

# EXTENDED ESSAY ON ORIENTALISM IN *THE PAINTED VEIL* BY WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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## Abstract

In this paper, the writer discuss orientalism in William Somerset Maugham's *The painted Veil*. The purpose of the paper is to analyze how West describes the East and how the East looks at the West. The conflicts, the settings, and the characters in the novel are also shown in order to supporting the orientalism. It also discusses how the orientalism works in this novel and how the relation between the occident or the west and the orient or the east.

In doing this research, the writer uses method of library research. The object of the paper is William Somerset Maugham's *The painted Veil*. The writer also uses postcolonial approach to help explain the issues in *The Painted Veil*. To investigate the issues, the writer uses orientalism theory by Edward Said.

From the discussion in the paper the writer finds that there are some parts that show the British view towards Chinese. The orientalism in this novel is also shown in some parts such as the policy of British in China, the purpose of conquering China, and in comparison of The West religion and The East Religion.

Keywords: Orientalism, The West, The East, The Orient, The Occident

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

Literary work is the matter of art. The matter of art is also about the understanding of the world and the civilization. Understanding literature means understanding the world and the problems in the civilization. By reading literary work, we can also find the solving of problems in the civilization.

William Somerset Maugham as a British author who has life experiences in China writes *The painted Veil* based on his experiences. The author as a British man uses the narration in the novel to create the assumptions and the doctrines that China is like what the author describes.

Orientalism, as one of the objects of postcolonial study can be defined as the conquest and control of other peoples' land and goods involving practices such as trade, plunder, negotiation, genocide, enslavement, and rebellion. The phenomenon of orientalism analyzes on how the colonization happens, how the response of the colonized nation towards the colonizer, and how the perspectives, assumptions, and opinions from the West toward the East implied in the literary works.

### Method of Research

The writer uses library research method to gather data. Library research is a research using source that is accepted and provided in a library. Library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/ expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research (George, 2008:7). The research is based on the main and the supporting data. The main data is obtained from books, articles, journals, etc

related to the object of the research. The object is William Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*. The supporting data are any information related to the analysis of the object which are taken from the library or internet.

### **Method of Approach**

The writer uses the theory of character, setting, and conflict in this study to analyze the intrinsic elements. The writer uses postcolonial approach to help explain the issues in *The painted Veil*. Postcolonialism can be defined as an approach to literary analysis that particularly concerns itself with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries (Bressler, 2003:199). Postcolonial approach and its theory investigate the culture clash with the ideological, economical, political, and social power as the accessories between two nations. Postcolonial approach is a suitable approach to be used in this project. Using this approach the writer will be able to analyze the problems in *The Painted Veil*.

## **AUTHOR AND HIS WORK**

### **Author and His works**

William Somerset Maugham was born in Paris, January 25<sup>th</sup> 1874. His father was a wealthy solicitor who worked for embassy in France. He was well educated in Germany as a medical student. He also worked as an obstetric clerk during his college life. He joined Red Cross in ambulance team during the First World War. He had sexual relation with both woman and man. It was a complicated relationship that he led. He believed that there is true harmony in the contradiction of mankind and that the normal is a reality the abnormal. William Somerset Maugham is well known for his play *Lady Frederic* in 1907. The success of his play pushed him to stop his career in medical world and devoted to be a full writer. Another work such as *Of*

Human Bandage (1915) and The Moon and Sixpence (1919) were also known as a successful book. William Somerset Maugham died in 1965 without having children and spent his life with the man he loved.

### **Summary *The Painted Veil***

Kitty, a British woman, married Walter Fane, a bacteriologist, who works as government doctor in Tching Yen, China. Actually, Kitty does not agree with the idea to marry Walter Fane but she has no choice since Kitty wants to live separately from his mother. In Tching Yen, Kitty meets Charlie Townsend, an assistant of secretary government. They conduct a love relation secretly. Finally, Walter Fane knows what happen between them. He is threatening Kitty that he will divorce her if she does not come with him to move to Mei Tan Fu, a place with Cholera epidemic in China. At the beginning, Kitty rejects his threat but she changes her mind because she does not want to raise a scandal between her and Charlie Townsend. In Mei Tan Fu, Kitty struggles to adapt with the environment. It is a savage area for a woman like her yet in this area Kitty finds her spiritual awakening with the guidance from Mr. Waddington, a deputy commissioner, who marries a Chinese girl. She realizes about what love is and she can understand his husband more and more. In Mei Tan Fu, Kitty is pregnant but she is not sure who the father is. Before she knows who the father is, Walter died because of Cholera. Kitty moves back to England and lives with her son who is named after Walter.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1. Intrinsic Elements**

#### **Character**

The important part of the story is character. Sometimes it is more difficult to read a character than read the whole plot in the story. The character in a story struggles with conflicts. Perrine states “The central character in the conflict, whether it is sympathetic or unsympathetic, is referred to protagonist character while the forces arrayed against him is antagonist character” (1988: 42).

### **Setting**

Setting is one of the important elements of fiction. According to William Kenney in *How to Analyze Fiction*, “setting refers to the time and space at which the event of the plot occur” (1966: 39).

“The elements of setting are the actual geographic location, the occupation and modes of the day to day existence of the character, and the time in which the action takes place, and the religious, moral, intellectual, social, and emotional environment of the characters” (1966:40).

### **Conflict**

Every story has its plot. The plot has conflicts that will build the story. Laurence Perrine in *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense* describes “conflict as a clash of actions, ideas, desires, or wills” (1988: 42). The conflict can happen between a person against the other person or group (man against man). The conflict is also between the person against some external forces such as physical nature, society, or fate (man against environment) or between the person against the element in his own nature (man against himself). The conflict in the story can be physical, mental, emotional, or moral (1988:42).

## 2.Extrinsic Elements

There are many views about postcolonialism study. One of them is *Orientalism* by Edward Said. Theory of Orientalism explains the creation non-europe called orientals is indolent, immoral, and thoughtless. Edward W. Said in *Orientalism* states that “Orientalism is affected by the imperialism of The West”. According to Edward W. Said, “Orientalism is a thought based on the difference between ‘The Orient’ and ‘The Occident’ ”. The Orient identically points out to Far East. The Occident and The Orient is integrated yet. The Orient is identically the inferior while The Occident is the strong one who conquers The Orient.

Said also stated that “Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.Orientalism is not only the matter of politics but also the matter of The West geopolitical awareness to conquer The East” (1977: 2).

The geopolitical awareness is supported by imperialism power, intellectual power applied in policies, cultural power, and also morality power.

Culture is the whole of human’s way of life include social descends obtained from an individual of his group, (Kluckhohn, 194) social value involved religion, arts, law, language, usage, and morality and etc. Those are created to make the values as the tool for deciding attitude, way of thinking, and perspective.

“Culture refers to te total of all ways of life-belief, feeling, language, art, philosophy, law, custom, morality, skill, tools, and machine etc- that are created and shared by individual of a particular society of social group” (from Dr. Mudjahirin Thohir, M.A.)

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## ANALYSIS

### Intrinsic Elements

Kitty Fane is a twenty-five years old woman. Her family lives in South Kensington. She is raised in the middle class family. Her father is a King's Council while her mother is a housewife who rules over the whole family. Kitty is beautiful. She has large and dark eyes, brown curly hair, and a lovely skin, as described, *but Kitty was a beauty..., for she had large, dark eyes, liquid, and vivacious, brown, curling hair in which there was a reddish tint, exquisite teeth and lovely skin* (Maugham, 1934:20). She likes dancing, party and talk active. She is a flexible woman, she can adapt with her new rural society in Mei Tan Fu although it is very difficult. She is a strong woman, she struggles to raise her only son without knowing who the father is. She is also openminded woman, she can take lesson in the past.

The other character is Walter Fane. The character of Walter Fane is considered as a protagonist character. He is Kitty's husband and a bacteriologist. He has brown sort hair, an oval face, brown eyes and sharp features. He is rather a tall and thin man. Walter is shy, but also smart and self-confident. He has a heart of gold because he goes to China when there is an epidemic of cholera. He is very devoted to his job. Walter puts himself at risk and treats sick people. He never talks a lot so that makes his wife bored. He says "I've gotten used to not speaking unless I have something to say". Walter Fane cannot express his feeling, he shows his feeling by his action for examples when he meets Kitty at the flower store and he has feeling with Kitty and directly want to marry with Kitty.

The first act is takes place in Tching Yen, China. It was a small town where the British lived during their time in China. In this town, Kitty struggles to adapt with the environment. This

setting has function as the building start of conflict in the story because the affair between Kitty and Charlie Townsend that cause a lot of problem is started here.

The second act is takes place in Mei Tan Fu. It was a rural area where the Cholera epidemic happened. In Mei Tan Fu, there is a chapel where Kitty helps the nurse there to take care of the children. In this place also, Kitty finds her life and her love too. She finds her spiritual awakening in this place. In Mei Tan Fu, there is a bungalow where Kitty and Walter live. The bungalow in Mei Tan Fu is placed by a missionary who dies because cholera.

The third act is takes place in England. It is the place where the relation between Kitty and Walter is started and the place where Kitty raises her son. The setting of England is also the representative for the west side while Tching Yen and Mei Tan Fu are the representative of the east side. It has a function as comparison between the east and the west.

The conflict between Kitty and Walter because of the affair between Kitty and Charlie. Walter feels his self pride is betrayed by Kitty. He always gives everything that Kitty wants but Kitty never looks at him and Kitty loves another man. Finally she thinks that Walter has punished her by bringing her to Mei Tan fu. She sometimes gets nightmare since she is actually afraid to move to Mei Tan Fu, but she never tells Walter as qouted below:

“Her night was tortured with strange dreams... she entered the cities, vast and dim, where the multitude thronged about her with curious eyes. The streets were narrow and tortous and in the open shops, with their strange wares, all traffic stopped as she went by...” (Maugham, 1934:107).

The conflict is also happened on between Walter and Kitty vs the Chinese. It is a conflict between man and woman toward the environment. Kitty is not only having a problem with the Chinese but also with the surroundings where she lives in. The conflict here is about the unacceptable feeling of Kitty as western people who lives in eastern society. Besides, the Chinese also shows unfriendly manner towards western people, they believe that western people



come to their land for exploring and taking all of the resources. Although Mei Tan Fu is surrounded by river and hills. And that is the beginning of the conflict between Walter and Chinese. It happened when Walter wants to inform that the river is contaminated by cholera epidemic because the Chinese society used the water of the river to their life everyday. Walter didn't want the Chinese people contaminated by cholera epidemic so he gave the solution by informing the doctrine but the Chinese people didn't like what the Walter do.

### **Extrinsic Elements**

Orientalism is the view from the west in this case, British towards the east in this case, Chinese. The British called it The Occident, while The Chinese called it The Orient. The Occident purposely conquered The Orient.

In the world history, British colony had conquered almost the several Asia and Africa. The British had three main purposes in conquering other nation. Gold, gospel, and glory were their purposes. Gold is all about money and the sources in the country, gospel is also called Christianization, and glory is the pride for conquering the other nation. In this novel, it is shown literally how the British, as the west, conquers the East. The word *Amah* is spoken many times by the character in this novel..*Amah* is the way they called Chinese servant. It is one of the ways the British states their power among China. It shows their purpose of conquering China that is gold. Another purpose of conquering China is gospel or christianization. In this novel, British builds some chapels in China.

The response of China resident towards British colonization is not good. The China residents hated the British who came to their land in order to conquering their land and took their sources such as silk and tea. Besides conquering their land, the policy made by British colony

was making the China residents lost. The China residents also thought that the policy such as the China residents should kneel to give respect to British making them losing their pride as China.

The view from British towards Chinese is shown in some parts of this novel. There is a part where Kitty indirectly said that The Chinese is barbar,

“Then, with the ghastliness of the supernatural, in the same stealthy, noiseless and horrifying manner, they saw the white china knob of the handle at the other window turn also” (Maugham, 1934: 4).

Then Charlie Townsend said, “....Only a Chinese would turn a handle in that way” (1934:4). Those statements show their thought that Chinese is unmannered because if they have manner they will knock the door first before they turn the door knob. Indeed, it is wrong since the one who tries to open the door is Walter Fane and he is a western. This stereotyping is shown by the western since they feel they are very good in every way.

## CONCLUSION

In *The Painted Veil* novel, there are some parts that show the British view towards Chinese. It is one of the evidences that the British had conquered almost the whole Asia and spread their power in their colony. Orientalism in *The Painted Veil* is shown in how the character, Kitty, adapts with the new society. Besides, how the west nurse's view about the Chinese woman that Mr. Waddington married with and also how the image of the west and the east believe is captured. The orientalism in this novel is also shown in some parts such as the policy of British in China, the purpose of conquering China, and in comparison of The West religion and The East Religion. The characters, the conflicts, and the setting are represent in picture the orientalism in *The Painted Veil*.